



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



250. t.
376.



600067611R





**IN THE CHOIR, AND OUT OF
THE CHOIR.**

**IN THE CHOIR,
AND
OUT OF THE CHOIR.**



**LONDON:
JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,
AND NEW BOND STREET.
NEW YORK: POTT AND AMERY.**

1869.

250. C. 376.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY JOSEPH MASTERS AND SON,
ALDERSGATE STREET.



In the Choir, and out of the Choir.

“**I**T’S all very well, George, being in the choir, but take care that you don’t let yourself become spoilt by it. You’re a good chap, every one knows, but it’s more than likely you’ll be so for a very little longer if you go on as you are now.”

Both the speaker and the person spoken to were boys, with only two years’ difference between them. George Fielding was the elder, and about sixteen years of age; Frank Mathews the younger. From early days had they been brought up together, they had shared the same care, the same school, the same parental love, for they were cousins. George was an orphan; his mother had died at her brother-in-law’s house soon after his birth, and left him entirely to his care. Mr. Mathews was not very wealthy,

he was a respectable farmer, and lived in the south of England.

Their parish was called Hursleydown, and a Mr. Drewett was the vicar. The old church had been restored, and a very different service from that of former times was now held under its roof. In place of the high pews were open fittings, and instead of the single voice of the clerk a surpliced choir intoned the responses. Crammed to overflowing was the village church, and before the table of the LORD each Sunday morn knelt a group of devout and earnest communicants. Mr. Drewett had been placed upon a very unfruitful soil when first he was appointed to the living of Hursleydown. Church-going was regarded as a custom and not a duty. God was worshipped in form but not in reality. The boys of the place disliked to attend church, the Sunday school had but a nominal existence, and the idea of being religious was contemned by every one. We must cast no blame, ask no questions upon how all this had been allowed to spring up. The Church of England has inactive as well as active servants, but God be thanked, the former are now rapidly decreasing, and she is becoming stronger, not weaker, and her services more loved, and more devout. Hursleydown had

been many years in arriving at its present state ; and diligently had the vicar worked, laboriously had he toiled to bring it about. The lads of the place were changed, and it had been a pleasure to many to be enrolled in the service of the church as choir-boys. They felt a new longing after holiness, a new desire springing up to be useful in two ways, to their God, and to their fellow-men. They were all in humble positions, but the poorest can vie with the richest in acquiring that treasure which moth cannot corrupt or time destroy.

George Fielding was a farm apprentice under his uncle, and though his work kept him from attending all the week-day services at the church, the Sunday found him arrayed in his white surplice at the head of the other boys. George was gifted with a great taste for music, and it was this that first brought him under Mr. Drewett's notice, who on further acquaintance found in the boy a deeper and more precious talent. Farmer Mathews was a middle-aged man ; he had married rather late in life ; and he was one of those peculiar people who seem to carry through life their own ideas of right and wrong, however distorted they may be. He had been a church-goer at Hursleydown in the

older days, and he disliked what he called these innovations. He was, however, sensible enough to force his opinions on no one else; now and then, perchance, he broke out in some long tirade against Mr. Drewett, yet secretly he was a true friend to the clergyman, though very antagonistic in principle. Frank and George from having been so long together were more like brothers, though the former inherited all his father's peculiarities, and was, therefore, no companion to the latter in a serious point of view. It was noticeable, Mrs. Mathews had observed to her husband, how George and Frank got on, "for they are always very affectionate, and yet they have not, I believe, one idea in common."

"Very likely, my dear," was the reply, "one is manly, and the other is childish. George is always after church, and our boy after sports, and games, and active pursuits."

"I wish Frank followed George a little closer, it would do him no harm if he was a bit steadier."

"Well, I think it would, for you see, my dear, there's just the rock on which we always split; our Frank will not be any the less the man for not being so serious as George. In my eyes he's all the better."

Mrs. Mathews made no reply. She was

very fond of George, he was her only sister's child, and on her death-bed she had promised to love him as her own. She had done this to the present time, and she intended doing so until the end. She often felt slight uneasiness about Frank, not that he was absolutely bad or possessed of any great faults, yet he was too gay and light-hearted sometimes, to make her mother's heart rejoice when she contrasted him with the steady-going ways of her nephew George.

The two boys were working in the fields, when Fred uttered the speech with which our story begins. It was a lovely summer evening and the coolness of the air made both the lads feel fresh and bright. They had worked hard that day. It was harvest time, yet neither of them were afraid of toil.

"So you think I shall get spoilt, old fellow; I hope not; though it will be very serious, won't it, if I do?" and George looked grave as he spoke.

Frank laughed at his expression of mock seriousness. "O you stupid fellow, you know well what I mean, you never have a single bit of fun when we come home from work, but if there's church, off you go; or if there's not, you are off to the village for some choir practice.

I declare sometimes I think I shall grow to dislike you."

George laughed at the threat, and certainly the speaker did not appear to be in earnest; he loved his cousin very deeply, but in very few things did he understand him. He was often taken to task by George, and the words he spoke to him produced for a time an impression, as with a serious look he would say, "Well, old fellow, I'll try," but the "try" was nearly always forgotten, and the good resolutions melted away before some more attractive object for his thoughts. Light-hearted, gay, and happy was Frank. His spirits were his chief stumbling-block. It appeared hard to him to be serious. He was very good-tempered, but too frivolous. Nothing was he afraid of, nothing daunted him. If he could only have imbibed some of George's seriousness, and George some of his gaiety, there would have been two very perfect representations of boyhood before us. George was often by far too serious in his demeanour. He gave Frank the opportunity of saying, "That to be religious he would have to look gloomy and sad, and that his face never could do."

It was one of the faults Mr. Drewett perceived in him, and often did he warn him to

strive and overcome it, as it was not so much the thing itself that he feared, as the effect it would produce on others. George's heart was really as gay as Frank's, but he could not openly show that it was so. He was very happy, though too often he desponded. He used to relapse into a state of gloominess without knowing it, and indulge in what his cousin called "black fits." George knew that his great fault was the too ready way in which his thoughts flew into his face and the slight control he had over his spirits. To think that religion makes boys or men gloomy is one of the most foolish of all thoughts; yet day after day this is whispered and believed. None but a godly man can know what is true happiness, though this must not be supposed to simply mean the state of youthful spirits that Frank Mathews enjoyed. Great exuberance of spirits is far too often the cause of mischief and unhappiness.

"I know, Frank, I make you think I'm often unhappy, I can't help it, though it's a great mistake. It's a fault I've got to fight against, for it's grown into a habit."

"Oh, you look well enough sometimes, but at others you are very gloomy, and you make me—well never mind, I can't stand a lecture to—

night, and I should deserve one if I went on with what I was going to say."

George caught hold of his arm ; he felt gayer to-night. "I've half a mind to shake the wind out of you, Frank, for you are too bad I declare. I never lecture you."

"Not lecture ! whew, says I, if you don't. I rather like it, George, though it has a fearful effect on my spirits."

"Get along with you, with your nonsense. I'm going home ; see, the men have already gone from the fields. I'll race you to the gate, Frank."

"Thank you for nothing, old boy. I own you are long-winded enough in two ways—but now be serious."

"I?" asked George, laughingly. "Why you said just now that I was never serious, didn't you?"

"It would be a novelty if you weren't ! But tell me, where are you off to, when we get back ? I want to go and blow up that wasps' nest, and see if I can find where old Taylor told me the fox got into the chicken-house last night. The wretch carried off that fine turkey poult."

"I promised Mr. Drewett to go up to the vicarage, the choir-boys are all coming up to

practise, and the schoolmaster also. We are to have a new anthem for next Sunday afternoon."

"Next Sunday afternoon, are you? Don't try your lungs, my dear boy, in running races now, for I suppose you'll take what you call a first, ain't it? I'll come, perhaps, and hear it, if you behave yourself."

"Of course you will."

"Conceited fellow, why should I? I've benefited enough of hymns without going to church. I hear you humming to yourself all day."

"Easy, Frank."

"Well, it's half the day then. It makes very little difference. The half's very nearly as much as the whole."

"Half an apple as much as a whole. Hurrah! I know what I'll do when next you ask for one of mine."

Such was the conversation, and such the characters of the boys before us. They were friends in every way excepting one, and that was on matters of religion. George had held his own and Frank his ideas on the subject. They had fought many argumentative battles, and neither won the other over to his course. Each, therefore, now understood the other's peculiarities, and made way for them, though secretly George

manly. I wonder what is the other. If I try and imagine will you tell me if I am right?"

George nodded his head.

"Well then, I fancy men and boys think that belonging to a choir is unmanly, for two reasons. First, because as you say, they are what they term, 'forced to look good,' and secondly, because they think that God's service must, to use a long word, neutralize the pleasures of life. To answer both these fears is easy. As regards 'looking good,' I can only say that their being disconnected with the choir, does not exempt them from this. God not only requires men and boys to look good, but be good, and those who disregard Him in this point will have to answer for it before His face at the last day of judgment. I fear, George, too many are actuated by this feeling of looking good, and even those who are Christians, men and women and even boys, allow themselves to act a part when they do not feel it. If you choir-boys, Sunday after Sunday, and week-day after week-day, come to God's house and sing His praises, and yet are only looking good outwardly, and not feeling good inwardly, believe me, you are playing a wicked, sinful part, for you are mocking your Creator. I cannot believe that any of you do this, but I

say, if you did, it would be on your part an act of mockery and not worship that you offer. Every person must be aware of this in his heart. Actions, George, are worth more than words, and examples more than precepts. If boys and men form part of a choir, they are naturally expected to be holy in their thoughts and to strive and love their God. They have a much greater influence and a more public example to set. Those around them must see in their daily lives the reflection of the prominent part they take in God's service. The angels carry our hymns and prayers to the throne of the Great King, and think you they will take from your lips mere expressions and not feelings? It is a very foolish thought, also, to fancy that being religious destroys the pleasures of life. It makes them more enjoyable, though it forbids the indulgence of anything that is sinful. Loving God makes men to understand and enjoy the real worth and weight of the harmless pleasures of this world. It enriches and does not destroy them. I wish you'd try and see if you could not persuade some more young fellows to join: (we have lost one or two of the boys lately, as you well know, by their going away for apprenticeship.) You can answer their objections, can-

not you, George, if they raise what I have furnished?"

"Yes, sir, I think I could, though I always feel unable to say anything when I get to talk about these matters, for they tell me that I myself look glum."

"You shouldn't do that, George. Try and exert yourself a little when you feel the fit coming over you. It's nothing more than a habit, and should be cured, for it is bad in two ways: its effect on yourself and on others. It's time you were off home, for I know your uncle don't like my keeping you late. Good night, my boy, and mind you always keep a good member of our choir. I put a great deal of trust in you."

George took his cap up and went out. He had been glad that Mr. Drewett had spoken on this question, for though he never felt shy at talking to him, yet he didn't think he could ever have mustered courage enough to have asked him about it; and some months ago these objections had been raised by Frank, when George had asked him to enter the choir. He had a capital voice, though a less accurate ear than his cousin. George had never thought of getting Frank to acquiesce when he asked him. It had been an attempt, and he had signally failed.

"Oh it's too good a thing for me, old fellow, I'm far too wicked and thoughtless."

As George walked home he ruminated over the conversation he had had with Mr. Drewett, and he contrasted his own feelings with those which his pastor had told him he should possess. Did he always feel what he was singing, always follow in his heart the words of his lips? No! he could remember many a time when he had paid but a cold formal act of homage to his God. "I wish Frank was one of us. It would be very different work then. I should feel much happier, and look happier, for half of what I am blamed for is caused by him. It's wrong, but I cannot help it."

"Hulloa there! George, stop a bit. Here, man, where are you going to, at the rate of an express engine?" cried a voice behind him, as turning round he saw Frank's figure standing out in the twilight against the clear sky. He was in a field the other side of the road, but before George could answer, had leapt nimbly over the barrier hedge, and was standing laughing by his side.

"I've had a glorious run, George, after a man I saw setting wires in that field for hares. It's a shame that these men poach the squire's

game when he's so good to us. I wanted to see the man's face to tell the keeper, but he was too quick for me though I ran him hard. I came a fearful cropper in a ditch as I leapt a hedge. I wish you could jump, old fellow, it is such fun."

"Ah! I dare say, especially when you tumble into ditches. No, Frank, I look before I leap, and then I generally find I like climbing over better. I never was made for a monkey."

"And that means I was. Civil you are, tonight, old boy, I declare. If I'm a monkey, I suppose that as we are relations you are in a measure connected with the tribe. Monkeys have cousins, I fancy."

George laughed and chased the boy down the road. When they stopped for want of breath, Frank cross-questioned him on his having been so late at the vicarage.

"Do you mean to tell me you've been singing ever since you left me?"

"Not quite, we sang a good bit, and the anthem goes capitally, Frank. Mr. Drewett praised us all for the pains we had taken."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, and what after the singing?"

"I stayed and talked to him, for a goodish bit."

"Talked to him? What about?"

"Many things: all kinds of subjects: the choir, and the choir-boys: and then he gave me some advice."

"What, pray, do you want that for? I'm sure you are good enough. You'll burst some day, if you have so much goodness pressed into you, take my word for it. Did he lecture you, or what? Advise you to give up my foolish company, eh?"

"Frank, what are you talking about? What a fellow you are. Why should I give up your society? You are the best friend I have in the world, if—you were a little less exuberant in spirits, and would think a bit more."

"Do you mean that, really, George?" and the boy turned and looked at his cousin in a peculiar way.

"Of course I do, and why not, if you please?"

"Oh, nothing, I only thought—well, never mind, tell us what Mr. Drewett lectured you on?"

"He didn't lecture."

"Well, preach."

"No, nor yet preach."

"Well, talk, it's all the same, George, I'm sure, preaching, lecturing, and talking; what I

should like to know, is the difference? Perhaps one is on paper, and the other ain't. Parsons however, now preach without reading off their writings, and I think I like it a good sight better. It comes more home to you, one looks out for a sermon on paper, but not for a talking to in words."

"Why I declare it's you who are turning thoughtful and sedate now, Frank. That's the first time I ever heard you mention your opinion about a grave subject. I'm very glad you have thought about sermons."

"Oh, but I haven't. I don't care for them, they make me sleepy."

"But you said just now, that you cared for being talked to, better than read to by clergymen."

"Well, never mind that now: what was done to you to-night? Let's hear the advice, as you call it, you've had given you. What's he got to say about choir-boys? Did he want me to be one of you?"

"Oh, I wish you would, Frank. I know you'd be twice as happy, and your voice would help us so; for we want a good second, and you sing a capital one."

"Blarney, George. Oh, I couldn't: why all

the fellows would laugh at me about here, if they saw me wearing a surplice. I know dozens of them who would point their fingers in scorn."

"And is that your only reason? Do you mind what they say to you so much, as to put that forward as your sole objection to entering the choir? It is not a sign of being very brave."

"I'd like to see the chap I'm afraid of. I'd fight any one before it should be said I was a coward, and I don't mind backing myself to play at games, as well as any one. You cannot, George, however, say this," added Frank, a little bitterly.

The elder cousin put his arm round the younger and made no reply. What Frank had said, was often a hard thought to him. He was not so expert in any game, and it was Frank who carried off the palm of popularity among the young men and boys of Hursleydown. If George had to bear anything it was rather dislike than love. The young men all set him down as being pious, and were disposed to exclude him from their sports and games. The fault lay not on the boy's side, though it now and then made him feel a little angry. It was a great trial to bear, for George stood out rather singly among all the

others of his own age. None of his companions in the choir were like him. His ideas of right and wrong were far more clear, and his standard of morality far higher than theirs. George had, however, faults ; what boy has not ? yet he strove hard against them.

“Let’s hear now about the advice,” said Frank, after they had walked on for some way in silence. “I’m sorry I said those words just now ; it was not right. I only wish I was more like you, that I do,” and his face spoke to the reality of his words.

George told all that Mr. Drewett had talked about, and when he had finished they were in sight of the farm.

“Then looking good, and being good, are as much a necessity out of the choir, as if I was in the choir ?” asked Frank with a surprised look, as George ceased speaking.

“Yes, you funny fellow,” replied George, smiling at his cousin’s surprised air. “Didn’t you know that before ?”

“Of course I did, but it never struck me in that way ; but I cannot understand these things, I know,” and with a shout he ran on ahead of his cousin, throwing stones at an unfortunate cat that was prowling about the premises.

“Come on, George, let’s have a chase. She’s not one of ours, and has no business here,” and with another shout he was hunting the animal off the place, jumping like a deer over everything that came in his way.

But George went into the house. Who could help loving his gay high-spirited cousin? and yet now and then he felt sadly out of spirits when he thought about him. He cared for Frank as much as a brother could do; and his whole soul was concentrated on him. There was something very noble and generous about him, then his gayness and light-heartedness made all people draw towards him. Yet what pained George, was his extreme carelessness about everything. When he went to school, he fought shy of his books, though he only wanted application, for by nature he was very quick at learning. He couldn’t sit still, and was very fond of playing truant. One minute he would be serious, at another breaking out into some wild song, or playing some trick or other. He never was two minutes the same. He was brave and courageous on all points but one, and that was, he cared far more for the opinions and sayings of those around him, than the guidings of his own heart and conscience. To do a dishonourable action

was far beneath him. He was sensitive on points of honour, yet he, as George well knew, might be laughed or teased into forgetting even this. For long had it been his cousin's desire to get him into the choir; for he was sure that he would be shielded and benefited by it in many ways. Yet Frank always said it was too good a thing for him, and that he should have to become sedate and sober, a perfect impossibility unless something were to happen to cut off some of his spirits.

The harvest was over, and the thanksgiving service had been held at the church, which was beautifully decorated with the various fruits, flowers and grain. The farmers had come from all sides to the evening service, and there had been a great tea gathering at the vicarage in the afternoon. George had been very happy all day, and this feeling was not a little increased by Frank having come to church in preference to going to a cricket match that was played between the Hursleydown club, and another village club. He had said very little about what he had intended doing, till that afternoon, when he had found George dressing for the tea party at the vicarage.

"I'm coming with you, I think. I suppose I may. Mr. Drewett invited any one, did he not?"

"Are you really, Frank! I'm so delighted. Of course you may come. He'll be surprised and glad to see you, I know. You're a dear old man I declare, to give up your cricket match."

"How do you know I've given up one, George?"

"Because Tom Sanderfon told me that you were going—that your name was down at the head of the Hursleydown eleven for the match to-day."

"Well he was sold then, for I never meant to go. Don't think that I did it for you, old boy, for you're very much mistaken. I wanted cake and buns, and not your society, you may be sure."

"Oh, I never took the compliment as being paid to me. Don't distress yourself on that point."

Frank had, however, given up his cricket solely to please his cousin, for he had feared that he had not been as good to him lately as he should have been. After the service he waited in a corner of the churchyard till George came out of the vestry, and the two walked home together.

"I wish I were you, upon my honour I do,"

was Frank's sudden exclamation, as he looked up at his cousin's face. "I never saw such a chap as you are. You looked like I don't know what, in church—so happy. I'll never call you glum again, after the expression I saw you wear to-night."

"I was happy, for I felt so thankful, and the service was so lovely. Did not you like those chants we had?"

"Yes, especially that one that went like this," and he hummed the air.

George looked at Frank in surprise; what had come over him? "What's the matter with you to-night?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Because you are so different from what I ever saw you before."

"A chap cannot always laugh, can he? You are finding fault now the other way. It used to be I was too gay."

"Ah, Frank, you've never said that before. You never have said to me that you couldn't be always gay. We ought to be happy, but what I meant when I have found fault with you, is that you never would be serious for a minute, and this evening you've been so for I don't know how long."

“Perhaps I’m not well and that’s the reason.”

“Not well! what do you mean?” and George stopped as he spoke.

“Oh, I’m only joking. I don’t feel very gay to-night.”

“And why not? what’s come over you, to work this sudden change! Do tell me, old fellow. What is it?”

“Nothing, George, to signify, and if you did know, it wouldn’t make you feel the least happier, I can tell you.”

Two days after this, George was busy about the farm. Frank had been out since early morn and had not yet returned. There had been some work for him to do, which was in all human probability likely to have been left undone had not George taken on himself the double share. Farmer Mathews had gone to market at Feverham, and would not return till late that evening, so Frank’s absence was not noticed by him. “I wonder where the fellow’s gone to,” thought George, as having finished what little he had to do, he went out to perform some of his cousin’s work in the potatoe field. The farm bell rang to summon all the labourers and people in to dinner, but he paid no attention to its sound. “I shall have plenty of time to eat this evening,”

he thought, and on he worked, humming some song that flashed across his mind.

"George has got a very industrious fit on him," said one of the farm men, as they saw him working away.

"Ay, no doubt he's doing double work in order to get off a bit earlier. Master lets him do this sometimes, for George is in the choir, and he's mortal fond of church-going. He's a strange sight different, I know, from Frank. Lor' bless you, that boy makes my sides ache as if from the rheumatiz, when he's got one of his merry fits on him."

"When he's got one of his merry fits! when did yer ever see him anything else? I never knew such a chap. He's never serious one minute; one never knows if he's in earnest, or in fun."

"It's better not being too serious when your young. Life's long enough to think of getting thoughtful when your growing old."

"It don't seem though to hurt George. I think I never saw him out of humour, and he's one of the most willing chaps I ever set eyes on," replied another of the men, in answer to the foregoing remarks.

"May hap he is, and may hap he ain't. He

hasn't got the life of Frank in him, though, and talking of him, where has he got off to to-day?"

"Likely enough he's on a lark somewhere. Always glad to get away from work if he can; but come along, the bell's done ringing, and I've got a lumping appetite."

The men walked on to the farm, and soon forgot both Frank and George in the more engaging occupations of their dinner.

Mrs. Mathews inquired for her nephew, and she heard he was working in the field, and was not coming home to dinner. Her son's absence did not so much surprise her, as she knew that he had betaken himself away ever since the early morning.

The afternoon came and went, and when evening arrived, George had finished his double day's work. What he had to do had been much less than his cousin, as he worked always more steadily, and left no arrears. He felt tired and hungry, but very happy in his heart, for he had practised self-denial in two ways.

This evening was generally the one in the week that he went to church. It was Wednesday. To many boys it would have been no mortification to do what George did, but it was

to him the hardest act of any that he had to perform that day. To finish his cousin's work required another good hour's toil, and George well knew that his uncle would be very angry were he, on the morrow, to discover that Frank had neglected to take up the potatoes as he had ordered him to do. By giving up going to church he would be able to finish it. Yet could he do this? Would it be right? It was hard to bring himself to believe that it was, yet George stayed and completed what he had set his heart on finishing.

"Where have you been, my boy, all day?" exclaimed Mrs. Mathews, as he entered the kitchen.

"Oh, I've been having a heavy day, aunt, in the fields. I've been taking up some of that strip of taters uncle was speaking of."

"I thought, George, Frank was to have done that."

"So he was, but I thought it had better be done as he was not here, in case uncle should be vexed to-morrow, when he found it neglected."

"It's a shame, George, for you to have to do your cousin's work."

"I'd do anything for dear old Frank, aunt, though I'd like to know where he's got to."

"Off on some foolish freak or other. I wish you could sober him a bit. I thought that the other night he was getting more sensible and serious; but the last two or three days he's been worse than ever. If he only knew how my heart aches sometimes, he might perhaps, George, listen to what is said to him."

"You mustn't fear, aunt. He's all right. You'll see Frank will change soon. He'll find that this light, careless way of treating things will weary him. He's a good heart, though I often think that he's ashamed of letting people see he has."

"If he'd only be more like you, my boy, I'd be content. Oh, George, what should I do without you? You're everything to me," and Mrs. Mathews bent over him as she spoke, and kissed his forehead.

"You mustn't wish that, aunty; with something better than that for Frank, for I'm very bad. Don't shake your head, for you don't understand. I am very wicked, really I am. You don't know what thoughts I have."

"So has every one; but are you not going to church to-night, George? It is your evening for it, isn't it?"

"Yes, aunt, but I'm too late."

“Why you’ve never missed before. What will Mr. Drewett think?”

George’s eyes glittered in a strange sort of way. Something shot between his dark eyelashes. He had never thought of what Mr. Drewett would think about his absence; he had intended going up to the vicarage, but when he came to consider the matter over, would it not be rather a publication of his self-denial, to say, “I didn’t come to church to-night, sir, because Frank was away, and I did his work in addition to mine, that my uncle might not be angry with him.” He had no other excuse to make, but this. There was nothing really in it—nothing that for a minute would have made Mr. Drewett think what he fancied he would. George remembered what had been his parting words, some weeks ago. “Mind you always keep a good member of our choir.” And he would do that, but how would they have got on as regarded the singing, without him? Why hadn’t he thought all this over in the field? Yet hadn’t he made a more noble sacrifice? His heart was wishing to go: God would see that. There was no self-indulgence, no staying away in order to procure some amusement or pleasure. It was solely to work for his cousin that he had acted thus. George fell into

a mesh of imaginary difficulties, and instead of carrying out his former idea, he told his aunt, "That he didn't think Mr. Drewett would mind, as he'd tell him on the practice night, on Friday."

"Why not go at once, my boy? You'll be in time to see them come from church."

"No, not to-night, aunt. I shouldn't like to meet the folks returning, not having been to church myself. It will be all right." But in this he felt he had made a mistake.

About nine o'clock Frank returned, hot, excited, and breathless.

"Where have you been all to-day, fir?" was Mrs. Mathews' first exclamation, as her son came into the room, "and who gave you leave of absence?"

"Oh, mother, I'm very sorry, on my honour I am. Don't be angry, but it's—There now it's all right, give me a kiss and I'll tell you, but where's George?" for he had left the room a little time before.

"Upstairs. But now I've a good mind to scold you, for it is very wrong leaving your work like this."

"Ah, mother, put off the scolding for another day. I'm sure it will keep. Give me a double

dose, dear, the next time I offend. I'm very hungry, and must have something to eat."

"And you expect me, I suppose, to provide you suppers when you've played truant all day."

"Oh, I'm very wicked, mother, but I shall die soon, unless I eat something; I've had a long day I can tell you. I've been to Manton."

"To Manton! why that's twelve miles off! What, pray, took you there?" and Mrs. Mathews turned round in surprise.

"Well, mother, don't be angry, but I wanted to see a fair that there is there. It was an awful lark. I walked over with Taylor and Barton, and some other chaps, but I came back alone. Oh I wished you had been there. I saw such a lot of things. Fancy, there was a fat woman that eats two sheep every day. You never saw such a size. I know it's all a story, but there was no end of a crowd to see her. I'd have liked to have given her that old wether we have. She'd find a difficulty in eating two, I think. Then, mother, there were the industrious fleas that drew little carriages and worked little toy wind-mills. I brought away a couple of them by mistake. They took a liking to me I suppose. Then I saw the lion-tamer and the elephant-

hunter and the giant. It was fine fun, I can tell you, but I spent all my money in the shows, and I had none to buy food with. I left Taylor and the others there, as I came home before they did. I'd have told you last night, only I thought father might say I had work to do. Does he know I've been away all day?"

"No, he has been to Feverham to market and has not yet got back."

"Then you needn't tell, you dear old darling. It will make no odds, and I promise I'll be so good for the future; but I must go and find George, he'll give me a lecture I expect; never mind, now that I have eaten some food, I feel capable of being reproved."

"George," he shouted, as he left the room, "where are you?"

"Here," was the reply from their bedroom upstairs.

"What are you gone to bed for so early?" as he entered their room, and found George in bed.

"I'm tired, that's all;" and rather put out in mind he should have added, but he didn't.

"Tired, so am I, I suppose, though I haven't had time to think of it till now."

"Where have you been?" asked George

gravely. "We none of us knew what had become of you."

"Ah, now for the lecture, go it, old fellow, I'm ready. I've been imagining it all day."

"Don't be a goose, Frank, but where have you been?"

"To a fair at Manton. Ain't I an awful finner?"

"You're a very cool one at all events."

"A mortal hungry one just now, but that's over. Well, what am I to do? Say I'm sorry and repeat:

' And still go on from day to day
Just as I always went ?'

Oh George, I wish you had been there. It was great fun," and he told all, and a good deal more than what he had just narrated to his mother.

"You're very bad, Frank, running off without leave, for it's not honourable," put in George, who was vexed, though amused at Frank's details of his day's doings. "It's not honourable, shirking your work, and it's a bad example."

"Here it comes, I thought I should catch it. Well, go on, old fellow, and I'll listen. I cannot give you more than five minutes, for I must

get to bed myself. Suppose you lecture while I undress. It will save time, and then we can both go to sleep together when you've done."

"I declare you're enough to make a saint angry, Frank—"

"Don't get into a rage then, for you're one."

"Now be quiet and listen, for I declare I think you've been very bad, to-day; you've been doing what you've never done before, going away without saying a word to any one, and over to Manton too, where you know my uncle especially dislikes us to go. I'm certain you've been led by others, and as I have often said, it is because you cannot stand what fellows 'think of you.' You may be brave in many ways, but you are *very cowardly* in others." George was put out, and he was not happy in his own mind, and he was angry at Frank who never seemed to give a thought to what he must have had to do for him as regarded extra work.

Frank however had never dreamt of his work being done during his absence, and his ingratitude was therefore imaginary.

"If that's what you've got to say you had better keep it to yourself. You're always preaching about courage, but I don't think I see you practise it much."

“ Frank !”

“ Well, what’s the matter ? You’re always trying to din into my ears some of your good stuff, and I don’t want it. I’m very happy as I am ; and you needn’t think you can make me more so by trying to fashion me into a saint.” All his manner had changed, and he was no longer gay but angry. “ You’ll make me weary of you, George, if you bother me much more. I know I care for you, but I can easily find much better chaps than you in more points than one,” and with a heavy bang of the door, Frank left the room and went down stairs and out of the house. He was flushed and angry, for George’s words had rankled him in a tender place. He *had* been laughed into going over to Manton. Ever since the harvest festival, had he been wavering between his wish to go and his duty to stay away. He had done nothing wrong at Manton, he had not got drunk as he omitted to say his companions had, but he had been disobedient to his father in ever going to the town, as it was a forbidden place to the two boys, in consequence of the extreme lowness and bad repute of the many who inhabited it. He had trusted entirely to his own strength of mind, and had signally failed. The set he went

with were not the brightest of the young men of Hursleydown. Frank knew that he was weak in resisting the opinions of others ; and he also knew that the reflection he had cast on George was unfounded, for George was as firm in resisting as he was weak in yielding. It had been, perhaps, a mistaken act on George's part, to take Frank to task, but he was put out a little himself and therefore not so guarded in the way he uttered his reproof.

Frank walked about the farm in the clear moonlight. He was trying to overcome his angry feelings, but he felt dejected and out of spirits. All that day he had felt ill at ease, though he assumed his gayness to cloak what were his real thoughts. Unconsciously as he rambled on away from the farm he came in sight of the strip of potatoes that he remembered he had to take up, and which he had twice been scolded by his father for forgetting. He walked into the field to look at them. Great was his surprise to find that some one had been at work and finished the whole for him. Who could have done this ? None of the farm men, for he knew what each had to do that day, besides it was not their custom to do extra work for any one.

"It's George," and tears rushed into his eyes.
"It's George, and I have been speaking t

so shamefully. No one but he would do this. He has done it to save me from getting into a scrape for my absence all to-day. What a fellow I am. Oh George, George, you are too good to me!" he uttered all this aloud as he stood and looked down at the ground, and with very changed feelings he at length walked away back to the farm.

As he softly opened the door of their room, he saw by the moonlight a figure kneeling by George's bed. It was his cousin, and he heard him distinctly say, "O my God, give me a more patient spirit, and help me to lead Frank to serve and love Thee: bless him, O my God, I humbly beseech Thee." He rose, for Frank's entry had disturbed him.

"I'm sorry, old fellow, that I spoke to you crossly just now, but I was put out, Frank: you mustn't go and cast me off."

The other made no reply. He couldn't speak, his heart was too full. What he had overheard George pray, and what he had seen in the field, silenced all power of speech, and his tears fell fast as he put his arms round George's neck.

How was it that his cousin was so different from him? How was it that George could pray, and he could not? Was in the choir, and out of the

choir so great a difference ? It seemed so, but why ?

The Friday choir practice came, and George went. He had been rather sorry that he had not seen Mr. Drewett before, to explain the cause of his absence on Wednesday. One of the choir-boys had told him that the vicar was vexed. Mr. Drewett looked grave as George entered the vicarage.

“Where have you been since last Sunday, Fielding ? you were not at church on Wednesday evening. Were you not well ?”

“Yes, sir, but I was working late, and missed coming in consequence.”

“It would be better that you worked harder, and then you would finish what you had to do sooner.”

These were all the words that were said. The practice went off pretty well, but George felt in no very bright humour for singing ; there was something in the above remark of Mr. Drewett’s that rather rankled in his heart, for he knew that such reproof was undeserved, for it had been work, and not idleness that had made him miss church. After the singing was over, he said good night, and went out, but he did not get very far before he stopped. “I must tell him the

real reason, though I dare say he'll think I wish to boast, but it's not that, I cannot go on and let him think ill of me ;" so back George walked to the house. The boys, when they came to speak to Mr. Drewett, were generally allowed to enter by a little door that led from the garden into his study. It saved them ringing the front door bell and having to wait till the servant answered it. George saw the lamp burning in the room, so he knew that the vicar was there. Gently knocking at the door, he entered.

"Who's that," asked Mr. Drewett, as he looked up from his writing. "Oh, it's you, George, is anything wrong? You are not unwell, or your uncle? What is it?" as he saw George's disturbed look.

"Please sir, it's only that I've come to tell you that I did not come to church on Wednesday because Frank was away, and I did extra work, as after I had finished mine, I did what he had to do. I wanted to come, but I thought I was not doing wrong in finishing, for uncle would have been angry had he found the work unfinished when he came back from Feversham where he had been to market. I'm very sorry, sir, I didn't tell you before, but I was afraid."

"Of what, George?"

"I don't know," replied the boy, after a little thought.

"No more do I, either, George, you mustn't fear me. There's not anything very dreadful, I hope, in me, and you ought always to tell me in matters where I can help you. We are of little use if our parishioners will not bring their troubles to us; and if I could only make you boys begin to do so, George, I should often feel happier. We make imaginary difficulties, and fancy troubles that are not real; and because we take no advice from those who can best help and advise, we lose ourselves in a mesh of imaginary faults, till we grow confused and fall away. Too often may the commencement of sin be dated from the sealed lip. Boys and men cannot bear their own burdens. To CHRIST they must come and He will help them, but as the Apostle tells us, 'Bear ye one another's burdens;' that means that we must each and all help one another more personally, more individually than we do; and you, George, and those who are more specially intrusted to me should not raise a great barrier in the way of communicating your troubles to me; for I am here, not to be feared, but to try and make myself loved, by loving you all. How can I do this if you keep

me at a distance, and are *afraid* of coming near me? I was vexed at your being away on Wednesday, and have ever since been wondering as to what could be the reason. Now all this might have been prevented by your letting me know what you have now told me. You say you were afraid. What of? of my thinking you idle because you had done extra work? No, George, be assured that there should be no fear where there is love. I shall fancy that you don't care for me next."

"Oh, sir," broke in George, "you know I never can repay you for all you've done to me. Indeed you mustn't think that."

"Well, I won't," said Mr. Drewett, smiling, "but you make me, you know. You are one of the choir-boys, and yet you shrink from coming to say a simple thing to your clergyman, who has known you ever since you were a little child. We mustn't let this happen again, my boy, for I look to you, more than any of the others, (your advantages have been more,) to set a good example."

"Thank you, sir, for what you've said," and George rose as he spoke. "I wish, sir, you knew my cousin Frank, for I'm sure you'd be able to do him good."

"What, Frank Mathews, what's wrong with him? I never heard he was a bad fellow."

"Oh, not that certainly, fir, but he's always too light in his way of thinking, and cares not for serious matters. It's hard to get him to church, and he never says his prayers, because it's too solemn he declares, and he ain't good enough yet. I wanted him to join the choir, but he won't. I'm sure he'd be far happier; for though he's known all over the country for his light-heartedness, he feels, I can see, very lonely and unhappy sometimes, for he finds in them sorts of gay fits very little that is real."

"How do you know anything about this, George, that you can express yourself so well on so grave a subject?"

"Because, fir, I've felt far happier in the choir than I ever did out of it. I never knew what it was to be really happy before, for it interferes with nothing excepting the doing what's wrong."

"You are quite right, but you mustn't fancy, George, that being in the choir will shield you very much from evil. It may some, but to others it will open out fresh trials and temptations. Being in the choir brings you more immediately, more publicly into God's service. It will not

do, however, to think that entering the choir will *make a boy good*. That wish should come first, and then the other will be an inducement. I'll see Frank, and talk to him some day, if you like."

George readily acquiesced, though he feared Mr. Drewett would find Frank a hard person to deal with. He then went home happier in mind than he had left it.

Frank was out when he arrived at the farm. Gone out, Mrs. Mathews said, with two of his friends, whom she wished he'd break with, and not follow so much. About ten o'clock he came in, as usual with a gay laugh, and some jesting speech.

"Never serious, never quiet for a minute, what a boy you are," said Mrs. Mathews.

"Ay, I know I am, mother. You'd sooner see me laugh, though, than cry; wouldn't you? Why, George, what's been up with you to-night? Oh, I forgot it was the practice. Well I've missed you a little."

"Where have you been?"

"Catch me telling, old boy; you'll say it was wrong."

"Then you've no right to have done it, if that's the case."

"No? well you are my father confessor, George, so I'll tell you. I've been up to Old

Crofs Mill with a couple of other chaps, and we netted the stream for trout."

"What, Frank, you did that? No, never, I cannot believe that."

"Quite right, my dear fellow, quite right; we didn't do that, but we took a couple of ferrets to Blackwood quarry, and put them in some of the holes there; and my wigs, how they bolted. We'll have a pie to-morrow, George, you'll like that. Rabbit pie out of the Squire's preserves; how stunning."

"Frank, I declare you are too bad. You couldn't do such a wrong thing. It's poaching."

"Well, I cannot help it. The rabbits ran out of their holes into the nets, because some stupid ferrets chose to enter."

"Did you really? I don't believe it. I don't believe you are a poacher, Frank."

"Well, I ain't then; though I like cramming you up to believe all these things."

"You haven't been then to Blackwood quarry?"

"Certainly not."

"What's the fun, then, of saying you had?"

"To make your dear old face look a bit long. I wish you'd have your picture taken, Frank, when you put on your go-to-meeting expression."

"My what?"

"Your go-to-meeting, propriety-loving face. It's killing to see you sometimes. I declare it reminds me of a parson. Well I won't be rude, for I love the old face, and I am always sorry when I make it look gingery."

"Frank, what nonsense you are talking. Be sedate, and just tell me your doings, for I'm going to bed directly."

"Well, I cannot be sedate, it's such a lot of trouble; but as to bed, I'm off there in a twinkling. I've been nowhere to-night, except about the farm."

"But where are the two chaps you went away with?"

Frank turned quickly round; "What do you mean? Who told you I went with any one?"

"Your mother, she said Barton and Jasper came for you. What became of them? Didn't you go with them?"

"What matters it to you, George, if I didn't? but if you want to know, I may as well say no to your question. Ask me, however, no more questions, for I shan't answer them," and he walked away as he had done before, rather angry, when but a second back he had been to all appearance the gayest of the gay. It had been however

assumed before he entered the room : Frank was in reality by no means gay. Yet he was of that character that he would rather have died in the attempt to keep up an appearance of gaiety, than be considered a sober person instead of a racket. He had very often lately begun to feel that his former light-heartedness was changing. He knew not why ; but even to himself were his spirits often oppressive. He envied George, many a time, his peacefulness of mind ; he envied him the things in which he appeared to take such pleasure, and he felt a great emptiness in the life he was leading. Day after day he frittered away his time, and idled instead of working ; while his cousin was always industrious and busy. George appeared to Frank to be so much more bright and cheerful, for he now discovered in him much that in former days he had passed unnoticed. Although he had many evident faults, still he never appeared to be troubled or bothered, or put out of temper by those thousand incidents that did all the three to himself. George was increasing in happiness of heart, whilst he was on the downward course and grew each day less and less like his former self. His companions also were becoming distasteful to him, and that evening he had had a final rupture with two of them.

They had asked him to join them in a disgraceful undertaking, to poach some of the Squire's game, only for "a lark, for a bit of fun." They had laughed at him when he had demurred, taunted and goaded him, but he held his own. He had given out his opinion so strongly, that a fight had ensued in which Frank had thrashed Jasper in a manner that he richly deserved. He had come off unscathed himself in all but one respect, and that was in feeling. He had been asked by those whom he had called friends, to do a dishonourable act. They had once made him break his father's orders, by going to Manton. He had quarrelled with George nearly in consequence, but had now determined never again to be caught by them. It had been a hard battle with his pride, but he had found strength to overcome.

When George got to bed he found Frank in tears. His surprise was excessive. In no way could he account for it.

"What's the matter, old fellow?"

"Nothing; why?"

"You are crying, Frank. Have I been cross, or what's up?"

"Crying, am I? Well I know I am. It's not you, George, but never mind."

"But I do, if you're sad it makes me so. Tell us what has taken place. I'm not angry with you, if that's what you think, though I saw you were put out a bit downstairs."

"Never mind, George, a person cannot always laugh, can he?"

"Some one thought he could, once upon a time. But you ain't ill, are you?"

"No, George, I'm tired, that's all. I cannot tell you more to-night, so don't ask."

"Only one question, Frank, and I won't. You haven't gone—and done anything wrong, nothing you are ashamed of?"

"No, on my honour, George," and the tears were almost stayed by the impetuosity with which he said this.

In the middle of the night a hand awoke George from sleep, and he found that his cousin was standing by his bedside.

"Oh I'm so sorry I've woke you. I dreamt you were dead, I thought that you were lying quite cold, and I wanted to see if it was true. It's been such a curious dream I have had, George; first of all you were in church as on Sundays, and then you were among a lot of fellows who were laughing at you, and wanting you to do something that was bad, for you stood

still and looked at them all, and when they asked why you refused, you said, and I thought you looked so proud, 'Because I'm a choir-boy,' and they all left you then to yourself, and I awoke, and then fell asleep and dreamt you were dead."

"Poor old Frank, and you were sorry? What a funny dream you've had, but get back again to bed, for your hands are quite cold. I'm all right you see."

He obeyed, and they both soon fell asleep.

Some days after this, George heard the whole story of Frank's fight with Jasper. It had made several of the young fellows of the place very inflamed against George, to whom they attributed Frank's altered estimation of them, as he had very nearly estranged himself from them.

They determined to have their revenge on George, to try and injure his character, and it was carried out in the following manner.

The next Friday evening, as he was on his way to the practice at the vicarage, when about half a mile from the village he was met by Barton and four others of the biggest and worst lads of the place. They began passing indirect remarks on him as he approached them. George felt that he was to be subjected to some novel per-

secution on the part of those who had some long time back played various tricks on him. He had heard a whispered rumour that Barton and others were blaming him for Frank's conduct. He was not afraid of them, for he was big and strong enough to take care of himself. Barton had no wish to fight himself, but among their group George saw a tall, strong-looking fellow. This was the champion of this persecuting set. Their object was to drive George into a fight, and then put him forward as their representative. They well knew what a stain it would be on George's name to be fighting, and they also were aware that no greater triumph could be gained over Frank than by ill treating his cousin. It was lucky for them that he was not there, for it would have required very little to have made him knock down a few of them.

"Here's the good young man that goes so regular to his music and to his church! Dear me, what a wonderful expression he has."

"Have you got your night-gown with you, Fielding?" and a hundred other such remarks were passed on George as he walked by.

"Stop a bit," cried Barton, and the whole band drew a line across the road. "Stop a bit while we talk to you."

George grew pale, for he knew that he was in for an unexpected trial. He was not afraid, for as the saying is, right gives might, and he had done nothing to feel ashamed of.

"What do you want with me? for I must be going on. It's the practice night. So let me pass please, or tell me what you have to say."

"Gently," cried two or three voices. "We've a heap of things to say to you. You needn't be in such a hurry, for you ain't going away so fast."

George looked round. There were about six in all, and they now began to press close around him.

"I'll tell you what we want," at length said the big lad, whom George recognised as an apprentice in the smithy, called Farlow. "You've been a plague to us all, and so we are going to make you fight, or give you a thrashing. You may choose which you like. You're by far too much inclined to rule us all, and we won't stand it."

George was amazed. "I don't know what you fellows mean, I've never done anything to any one of you; and as to fighting, I certainly shall not do that, for I have no reason to do so, and if you choose to thrash me, you are perfectly at liberty; though I warn you, that though I

give no blows I shall defend myself. I shall not fight, as I don't think it right."

"Why not, pray?" asked two or three derisively.

"First, because none of you have ever offended me to make me wish to do so, and secondly, because—"

"Because what?" all shouted.

"Because I *am in the choir*, and I will not fight. I am not afraid excepting to do what is wrong. You've no right to stop me like this. I know that you want to make me disgrace myself by fighting with you fellows; but if you stand all night you'll not make me."

"Then take the consequences," and a shower of blows were inflicted. George warded off some, but he never lifted his arm to return the blows. It should not be said of him that he had brought dishonour on the choir by what he now did. He kept his temper, though it was hard work.

Farlow suddenly struck George several heavy blows on the back of the head, which knocked him down, while the others kicked him when he was on the ground. A sudden noise of a person running made them desist, and before they were well aware, Frank himself was in their midst. He had been to Hursleydown and had overheard

what Barton had threatened to George. In a minute the scene was changed. Several, directly they saw Frank, ran away. But Farlow and the rest held their ground.

“What are you fellows up to?” shouted Frank, almost beside himself with indignation. “Cowards that you are every one. I’ve heard your vile plot to ruin George, as you call it, because you think he has had to do in my leaving you. And he has. I’m proud to own it. He’s made me see what a fool I’ve been. You thought to make him fight, but he hasn’t, I know. Why hasn’t he? Is it because he’s afraid, when he’s strong enough to thrash every one of you, like nuts in a mill? No, it’s because he’s too manly. He promised not to. He’s often told me. He’s promised never to fight because he’s in the choir. I’m not, however, and so I’ll—” and with a rush at Farlow he caught him by the collar, and seizing a good thick hazel-stick, he beat him most unmercifully for several minutes. The rest, rather terrified, took to their heels and ran. Frank was very strong, more so than his cousin, and they knew not upon whom he might next vent his indignation.

Having at length punished Farlow sufficiently, he thrust him away with a kick of his foot.

“Go home with you, and if I ever come across you again doing these sort of dirty cowardly actions, I’ll give you another dressing which you’ll not forget. You’d better be off quickly too, or may be your presence will make me take up the stick again,” and he stooped significantly. Farlow took the hint, and made off as well as his sore back and bones would allow.

Frank then turned to George, who had risen and shaken himself. He had got some ugly kicks and bruises, and rather a lump from the blow on the back of his head.

“Oh, George, why didn’t you kill them all like a set of new-born kittens? You’re by far too good. I wish I’d been here to help you. You’re in the choir perhaps, but I’m out of it, and so there’s no harm my letting them feel what a pair of fists is made for. Are you hurt much?”

“No, though I must own I felt rather stupid at first. They’d never have hurt me if it hadn’t been for the blow on the back of the head, I’d have easily kept them at bay. It was only *me* they were wanting to hurt, so I didn’t care. I’m tough enough to be able to stand a few blows. Perhaps if it had been some one else who had been in my place, I might not have kept my fists

still. You gave Farlow a heavy inning with that stick."

"No more than he deserved; but I declare you are the dearest old chap that ever lived; fancy you letting a set of wretches hit you because you knew what they wanted to do!"

"Fancy, Frank, if I had given them what they desired, and let them succeed in publishing abroad that they had got me to fight! how all those would crow who are ready to pounce down on us choir-boys for anything wrong we may do: those who hate Mr. Drewett and are opposed to our church. They'd not go into the rights and wrongs, but would condemn us all at once. No, I'd sooner have died than have fought any of them."

"I believe you, that I do, George, though you know I cannot quite understand the feeling that causes your thoughts on this matter. If a chap angers me I hits him; if he knocks me down, well, that's all fair. I'm a sinner though, and you're a faint, so there's the difference."

"Nonsense, but—oh that leg of mine has got a kick on it. I must go home, for I can't go so dirty and bruised to Mr. Drewett. I wish you'd tell him I'm unable to come to-night,

would you? You needn't say why, if you tell him I sent you."

To George's great surprise Frank appeared very willing to go and do the bidding he required, though he said as he turned off to take the message: "I shall be very much surprised if I don't tell him the whole story. You think, I suppose, I'm going to bottle all this up, and no one is to hear of these fellows' doings. What a wicked fellow you are, George; you make me feel quite grieved," and off he ran towards the vicarage, leaving George to limp home bruised in body but happy in mind.

It must have been nearly three hours afterwards when Frank returned. He was full of Mr. Drewett's praises, with whom he had had no end of a jolly talk. "He's such fun, and so kind. You should have seen him when I told him about you, and what had happened. His eyes filled with tears, and he said you were a noble fellow, and had acted far more bravely than if you had fought with those boys. I asked him about fighting, if it was wrong, and I'll tell you what he said: 'To make fighting a practice is wrong, for it's simply an indulgence of evil passions; fighting should not be encouraged, and boys should not be eager to fight, as he said they

far too often were, for in God's fight it was wrong.' But he thought I had done right in punishing Farlow, and that to fight might in special cases be allowable, where right had to be maintained by force when persuasion had failed. He said a lot more that I've forgotten, and then he asked about me, a thousand questions, and fancy, before I left he inquired if I'd like to come into the choir."

"And what did you say?"

"No. I told him I was afraid I was too bad, upon which he talked a lot more to me. I liked all he said, for he was so cheerful and kind with it all. I don't know what I haven't got to tell you. You are to go up there to-morrow evening. I never thought parsons might be so happy before."

"What do you mean, you odd mixture of fun and earnest? Why may not clergymen laugh?"

"Oh, I thought they always said it's wrong to make jokes and have fun. Mr. Drewett however seemed to me to be very happy, and not at all sad."

"Didn't I always tell you from the beginning, Frank, that trying to serve God made one happy?"

"I know you did; but I always thought those

expressions were your own, and I always held you to be a wonderful fellow, and so I didn't think they applied to other people. But I see I'm wrong."

"Why did you say 'no' to coming into the choir, Frank? I wish it had been 'yes;' you'd feel much happier."

"Should I? well, I'll try some day. I cannot say that I feel now as I used to do. I suppose it's a punishment, for I've never been serious, though you've always been like a couple of fathers with your good advice."

"Ah, Frank, it's very often an easy thing to advise, but a difficult matter to practise what one preaches."

"You ought to have been a parson, George. You're made for one, that you are. My! what jolly sermons we should have! But I'll tell you what, it's time I was off to sleep, or I shall be lazy to-morrow morning," and with this for a finishing remark, he began to undress.

We must now pass over a certain space of time. Three months have elapsed since what has been related took place. The snow of winter covers the ground, and all is white and beautiful. Autumn leaves are still and silent beneath

the snow covering. The winds whistle through the bare branches of the trees, but they stir not at the sound. They cannot try and imitate their summer flutterings by frisky gambols. A good four inches of snow lies over the earth, and winter in all its severity has come. Not much has changed at the farm, though there hangs over it a strange cloud of sorrow. A stillness, as of death, prevails around. Mrs. Mathews whispers as she speaks to her husband. But George and Frank are nowhere visible. Mr. Drewett calls. He is received in silence, and his question of "How is Frank?" is met with a serious, tearful face.

"Oh, sir, he is but sadly, and the doctor fears he won't get over it. He's quite unconscious, and knows no one."

"And George, how is he?"

"Oh, he's middling well; but he'll never leave Frank's side, and the doctor told me this morning he wouldn't be surprised if he got it next, for he's not a strong lad. But George pays no heed, and when I ask him to take some rest, he only shakes his head: 'No, aunty, I'm well enough. I don't fear the fever, nor am I afraid to die if God should think fit to make me take it.' Oh, sir, if it wasn't for George, I should

long ago have given over hope. He's so cheerful, and keeps us all up by the way he hopes Frank will get better. There's few as would have tended a brother as he has my boy. He won't let me do much, for he says it's a useless risk, and that he can do what is required, and Frank being unconscious, my being near him is of little use. Hardly any one goes into the room but him. He won't let them."

"And yet people call George a coward, Mrs. Mathews," and Mr. Drewett's thoughts flew back to a Friday evening three months back. "I don't believe a braver, better fellow lives. But tell me, has not Frank's illness been very sudden?"

"Yes, sir. It was but yesterday week that he came back from Feversham, where he had been to get a few things we wanted, and on his return he complained of feeling a bit poorly. We didn't think much of it at the time, till two days ago, when he got worse, and so we sent for the doctor, who said he had got typhus fever, which, as you know, sir, is bad just now in some parts of Feversham. Since then Frank's been getting worse and worse, and now they say he's going to die," and the poor mother burst into tears.

Mr. Drewett spoke consolingly and hopefully to her. He told her that she should not despair, but that she should pray to God to spare her son if it was His will so to do: that Frank was young and with a strong constitution, and that young people were better able to battle with disease than those more advanced in life, and that though many deaths had taken place at Fever-sham, many very extreme cases had recovered.

"Do you think George would like to see me before I go? I can do no good to Frank while he is unconscious, though I'll come every day to see you, and to know if I can do anything. You mustn't shake your head, Mrs. Mathews. I've no family to care for, so I should not have any fear about taking George's place, if he'd let me, but I fancy he would not relinquish it."

"Thank you, sir. I think George would hardly come down stairs, and you would be doing no good to go up, and only running a useless risk. I'll tell him you've been: he'll be pleased to hear it I know. He said last night that he'd not see you he feared again in church for some time, for he must not go about now, it wouldn't be right, as infection is soon carried, and some of the neighbours are strangely fearful of the fever."

"Well, he's in the choir, tell him, though out

of it for a time, and say from me that we shall pray for Frank and also for him in church. He'll need our prayers as well. May God shelter him from the fever;" and with a shake of the hand Mr. Drewett departed.

He was sad at heart, though he showed it not. He feared for George, exposed as he was to the dangerous enemy which was so forely contending with the life and strength of his cousin. He feared because, though in many ways George was strong, yet he agreed with the doctor in believing his constitution to be weak. "People may call him a coward," he soliloquised, "but I wonder how many would do what he has done. It may seem a very common-place action, but—" and Mr. Drewett walked on, and left unfinished what he would have said.

In the mean while let us glance into the sick room.

On his own bed, which had been moved further into the room, lay Frank. His gay, happy face was a strange, sad sight. Already the most virulent forms of the disease were showing themselves in his features. The lips and the lower part of his face were discoloured. Black typhus, as it is called, had set in. On a chair by his side, pale and anxious-looking, was George. On his knee

lay a book, from which his eyes constantly turned to gaze on the sick form beside him.

Inarticulate expressions were every now and then uttered by Frank, but to George's ear they were hardly audible. As he gazed on his cousin he could scarcely believe his eyes were not deceiving him. Could that be Frank, that prostrate form his light-hearted, wild-spirited cousin? Many a time the tears flowed as he thought of the days gone by, and cast a longing, wondering glance into the future. What was hidden there? Was he to lose his cousin? Was he to be separated from him? and then a saddening thought would force itself into his mind. It might have been a wrong one, but he could hardly quell it, as he remembered the little thought Frank had ever given to death or anything beyond the grave: how much happier would he have felt had he known that he had ever followed and loved his God. Yet what right had he to judge him? and he prayed for forgiveness as these thoughts suggested themselves.

The hours passed by and grew into days, and the days into weeks, and yet the Angel of Death had not taken him away. It was the evening of the fourteenth day ere the watcher saw a sign of the battle's termination. George was sitting

alone, as he had done for many a long day. His eyes were heavy with weeping, for the doctor had given but little hope : earnestly had he been praying that Frank might be spared to him, when he suddenly saw a smile cross his poor fevered lips, and he heard him utter something very softly. It sounded like his own name, yet could it be that he was thinking of him in his delirium ? He drew nearer, and faintly, like the sighing of a breeze, he heard Frank say, " Dear old George."

There was no delirium, no unconsciousness, the battle was over. GOD had given him life. Yet it was a very feeble state that he had been left in, and unless stimulants were instantly given, the doctor had said, when consciousness returned, he would surely die, for the reaction after the fever is always so great. For hours George, his mother, and Mr. Drewett, who happened to be downstairs at the time, and had instantly come up at George's signal for his aunt, were occupied in giving stimulants to Frank. The flame of life was very feebly flickering when they had first entered the room, not knowing what to expect from the sudden summons. George had only pointed at the bed : their eyes told them the rest. Frank was free of the fever. The stimulants told upon him at length, and the three

watchers had the satisfaction of seeing him sink quietly off to sleep.

All danger was not over, till about four days afterwards, when though but a shadow of his former self, the doctor pronounced Frank to be on a fair way to recovery. Who can picture the joy of the whole house, and not only of the house, but of the neighbourhood? Frank was not to die, but to live. As to George, he hardly seemed able to contain his joy, though as Mr. Drewett remarked, "We shall soon have you to look after if you don't take care of yourself a little now."

Recovery in cases of this sort is generally very slow and tedious. The coldness of the weather retarded Frank's progress, as they had to guard against all exposure to cold and draughts, and on no account was he allowed to leave the house till nearly five weeks had passed by.

During all that time Mr. Drewett was a constant visitor, and it soon became evident to all that Frank's illness had changed him; he was more thoughtful, but still gay and happy.

George was not destined to fall a victim to the fever. He was knocked up by his long watching by Frank's bedside, but he soon recovered with care what strength he had lost.

"I don't think, George," said Frank, one day, as his cousin was sitting with him, "that I ever before knew what death meant. I had heard of people dying, but I gave it no thought. I've been very near the grave, old fellow : I wonder where I should have gone to, had I died, for I have never tried to live for God."

"You mustn't question that, Frank, for we cannot tell. You've life before you now, and you can make new resolutions."

"So I will : but, George, how am I to thank you for all your love to me ? You might have caught the fever, and died. Why did you run the risk ?"

"Because I didn't fear death, Frank, and I knew that if God intended me to take the fever, I should do so. Besides, I love you too much to leave you when I can be of use."

Frank put out his thin white fingers, and took hold of George's hand.

"I ain't worthy of you, George, that I ain't. You won't believe me, I dare say, but it's all true. Do you know that some time ago when you first joined the choir, I determined I'd try and get you to give it up by making you feel ashamed of it. I was little aware of your depth of heart then. I didn't like to see you do what

I couldn't, and I never could bear the thought of having to live for God. It seemed to me so silly to talk of being serious and religious when I was young. How could one enjoy the world and its pleasures, I thought, if one had always to ask whether a thing was right? I often hid things from you that I did when I afterwards found out how little you cared for my laughing at you, and how manfully you kept your own ways and thoughts. I was afraid of you sometimes, for I couldn't understand you, and when I saw you loved me so much, I felt ashamed often of myself. I used to tell the chaps about, you were good for nothing but church. I soon found out my mistake. I always have loved you, George; you made me in spite of myself. I often wanted to hate you for being so serious and good, but I couldn't do it. For the last six months you've made me see what a mistaken fellow I am; and though I've often teased you, I didn't really mean it, for I knew you were the best, dearest old fellow in the world. It's all you that have made me feel as I do now: I want to try and live as you have, and I shall be, I know, far happier than I ever was before. George, you have made me see that serving God makes a fellow manly and not cowardly, strong and not weak."

“Try for something higher than to follow me, Frank. We have a glorious example, Mr. Drewett says, in our SAVIOUR, and it is right that we should strive to be like Him. For He has left us an example that we should follow His steps.”

Four months after this, when the spring sunshine was bringing out the buds on the trees, and opening out to Nature a new existence in another year, when Hursleydown was losing its dreary aspect of winter, and blossoming afresh in new beauties, the church bells rang out their Sunday chimes. There was a large assembly flocking to church—a larger congregation than usual. The Bishop of the diocese was to hold a Confirmation that morning, and there were about a hundred and twenty candidates to be presented.

As the surpliced choir marched into church headed by George, there followed in their rear a boy also surpliced, but apparently disconnected with them, for he seated himself apart from the choir. The service continued, and the Confirmation candidates were, at the end of the Morning Prayer, addressed by the bishop, after which the Confirmation Service was commenced. When the moment came for those who were to be con-

firmed to leave their places to kneel before the table of the LORD, the boy before mentioned left his seat, and walked up with the others. Many an eye fell on that snow-white surplice among the other groups of young men, and many a question perhaps was raised as, leaving the Communion rail, Frank Mathews took his place in the choir beside George. He had entered it at last.

We must again hurry over several months. Two boys are standing in the field where a year ago we found them. The harvest is come. The summer is past. They are both grown taller, and deserve more the title of men than boys.

“I say, George, do you remember what I told you here last year about your being spoilt by being in the choir?”

“Yes, that I do; and do you think it has come to pass, and your words and fears been realized?”

“You terrible fellow! Don’t you know how often I have told you the shame I feel even now when I remember those words? I used to think I could not be happier, but I *am*, George. I feel that living is a different thing when one’s object is to try and serve God, and that far from

it being unmanly, it makes me feel twice my former self. I haven't lost either in friends, as I used to say I should when you first asked me to enter the choir."

George smiled at his cousin, and in that smile was a strangely happy look. There was Frank, the once madcap, so to say, now the most steady of the Hursleydown choir-boys. In body he was grown more manly, in appearance more noble; wearing the surplice had not brought the dreaded change. As regarded friends, few were more popular than he was. The old set had died away, and a new and improved one taken its place.

George walked up close to Frank's side as he ceased speaking, he put his arm carelessly round his neck, and whispered some words in his ear. The breeze bore them away, but they brought back Frank's reply,

"Oh, George, you know I do! and what is more, I owe it all to you, and God bless you for it. You have taught me that 'trying to be good,' when God helps us, does not make life dull or unhappy. Yes, I am far happier in the choir than I ever was out of it."









